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TV Reporter Fired Over Letter on Court Order

By Edward Walsh
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A reporter for a Baltimore television station has been fired in an apparent dispute over a letter urging the station not to allow law enforcement officials to view film taken two weeks ago during disturbances at the University of Maryland's College Park campus.

The reporter, Arthur W. Geiselman, 46, said he was fired late Friday afternoon by Brent O. Gunts, manager of WBAL-TV.

Gunts said yesterday that the dispute was "purely an internal matter." He declined to comment further.

Geiselman said he was fired because of the distribution to other news media of a letter to Gunts from all of the station's 29 news department employees urging defiance of any court orders to produce film of the University of Maryland antiwar disturbances.

Last week, Prince George's County State's Attorney Arthur A. Marshall Jr. obtained a court order directing officials of three Washington area television stations to produce all films taken during the disturbances, which occurred April 18, 19 and 20.

Marshall's office Friday backed down from that demand, saying it had a right to see the film but that "as a practical matter insisting on that right could endanger the person of newsmen on the scenes of later disturbances, if any."

Geiselman said WBAL-TV did not receive an order to produce its film, but that station employees feared one might be forthcoming. On Tuesday, he said, the news department employees sent Gunts the letter urging him to "stand fast against these efforts to subvert the First Amendment of th U.S. Constitution."

Geiselman said he "and a couple other guys" later decided to distribute copies of the letter to other news media in Baltimore because "we felt there should be a public airing of the issue."

Gunts fired him less than two hours before he was to appear on the station's 7 p.m. news program, Geiselman said.

Geiselman, a former reporter for the Baltimore Evening Sun, has won several awards for his reporting.